

Developing Grammar Proficiency Through Communicative Activities

During this session, we will:

- explore key principles associated with communicative grammar instruction
- learn how to apply these principles in the classroom
- consider how to create and evaluate grammar activities that will enhance your students' ability to use English for real communication
- examine several practical grammar activities that can be used with learners of different ages and skill levels; these activities require minimal equipment, supplies, or space



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Nancy Ackles



In her long career, Nancy has had opportunities to work together with and learn from many teachers, first in the United States and then in Africa, Asia, and Europe.

She holds a PhD in Linguistics and is the author of *The Grammar Guide: Developing Language Skills for Academic Success*. Nancy also developed *American Teens Talk!*, a free audio and text resource available on the American English website: americanenglish.state.gov

She especially admires and enjoys collaborating with language teachers who work in schools with limited resources.



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Developing Grammar Proficiency Through Communicative Activities



Writing

Scaffolding

Speaking

Language Use



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Who are the true experts on teaching in your context?

YOU are!



Who are Olympic Champions in our field?

If you work in a low-resource classroom,
YOU are!



Our plan for today:

1. A little bit of history of grammar teaching.
2. Three principles for communicative grammar teaching.
3. Some activities for you to try with your students.

A very quick history of grammar teaching

Why do we focus so much on “Communicative Language Teaching”?

In the past we often:

- Focused on grammar rules and grammar language.
- Emphasized being able to translate between L2 to L1.

Now we usually try to avoid past problems by working on Communicative Language Teaching.

What, in your opinion, are some characteristics of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)?



CLT Characteristics

- Learners speak English, not speak *about* English.
- Learners are encouraged to experiment with the language and are allowed to make mistakes while they are learning.
- Learners interact with other speakers (teachers and other learners) and are encouraged to speak a lot.

Communicative Grammar Teaching Principles

1. Teach formal rules and metalanguage only as much as is needed by your students.
2. Create opportunities for learners to use language structures in meaningful ways, communicating their own ideas on personally significant topics.
3. Provide support (scaffolding) so learners can successfully communicate while getting enough practice with the target structures to make the structures their own.

Principle 1

Teach formal rules and metalanguage only as much as is needed by your students.

Metalanguage = words we use to talk about language

Examples: *noun, verb, adjective,*
present perfect tense,
adverbial clause



-ing/to... -ing/to...
like
remember
be
see
stop
Gerund
infinitive
continue
would like

In your context, do you teach many formal grammar rules to your students?

Why or why not?



My Hand Says Hello

My hand says hello,
My hand says hello,
Every time I see my friend,
My hand says hello.

My head says hello,
My head says hello,
Every time I see my friend,
My head says hello.



What grammar points are students practicing
when they sing this line?

“My hand says hello”



What grammar points are students practicing when they sing this line?

“My hand says hello”

- a possessive pronoun (*my*)
- simple present tense
- the -s on third person singular verbs
- the correct pronunciation of *says*
(spelling often causes mispronunciation)

What grammar points are students practicing
when they sing this line?

“Every time I see my friend”



What grammar points are students practicing when they sing this line?

“Every time I see my friend”

- The whole phrase is used as an adverbial to modify the main clause
- There's a quantified noun (*every time*)
- There's a noun complement clause (*I see my friend*)
- There's a silent complementizer (*that*)

My Hand Says Hello

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My hand says hello,
Every time I see my friend,
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My head says hello,
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Every time I see my friend,
My head says hello.



What are some songs you have used
to help students learn
English sentence patterns (grammar)?



To find more songs:

- Do an internet search for “songs for teaching English grammar”
- Explore the free American English *Sing Out Loud* resources
<https://americanenglish.state.gov>



Children's Songs



Traditional Songs



American Rhythms (popular, contemporary)

Principle 1

Teach formal rules and metalanguage only as much as is needed by your students.



A word cloud of English grammar terms related to verb forms. The words are arranged in a cluster, with some overlapping. The terms include: -ing/to... (orange), infinitive (purple), Gerund (blue), continue (red), stop (orange), would like (green), see (green), be (yellow), remember (orange), and like (red).

-ing/to... -ing/to...
like
remember
be
see
stop
would like
continue
Gerund
infinitive

Principle 2

Create opportunities for learners to use language structures in meaningful ways, communicating their own ideas on personally significant topics.



Principle 3

Provide support (scaffolding) so learners can successfully communicate while getting enough practice with the target structures to make the structures their own.



When we learn a new skill, there are usually:

1. Things we can do
 2. Things we can do with some help
 3. Things we can't do
- Number 2 is where we do most of our learning
 - Help is often called “scaffolding”

Scaffolding

Can be help from...

- Teachers
- Other students



What Are They Doing Today?

Before class:

1. Choose a living person that your students know about.
2. Write three sentences about what that person might be doing right now.



What Are They Doing Today?

In class:

1. Divide your students into groups of two or three students.
2. Ask each group to write the name of a famous person on a small piece of paper.
3. Collect the pieces of paper.
4. Demonstrate the activity.



What Are They Doing Today?

What is she doing right now?

- She is bathing her baby boy, Archie.
- She is talking to her husband, Harry.
- She is preparing to visit her mother-in-law, Elizabeth.

Who is she?

- Meghan (Markle) Duchess of Sussex

What Are They Doing Today?

5. Pass out one “mystery name” to each group.
6. For extra support, write your example sentences on the board.
7. Have each group write three sentences in present progressive tense telling what their person could be doing right now.
8. Taking turns, each group reads their three sentences aloud to the class and the other students try to guess who the person is.

Let's Evaluate!

- Does this activity give students practice using a structure?
- Do students express their own ideas on a topic that is meaningful to them?
- Does this activity provide scaffolding?



How can we adapt this activity and use it to practice other structures?

- What did this person do last week or last year?
- What will this person probably do next month or next year?
- What does this person usually wear, drive, talk about, or do to relax?
- What could, might, may this person be doing?

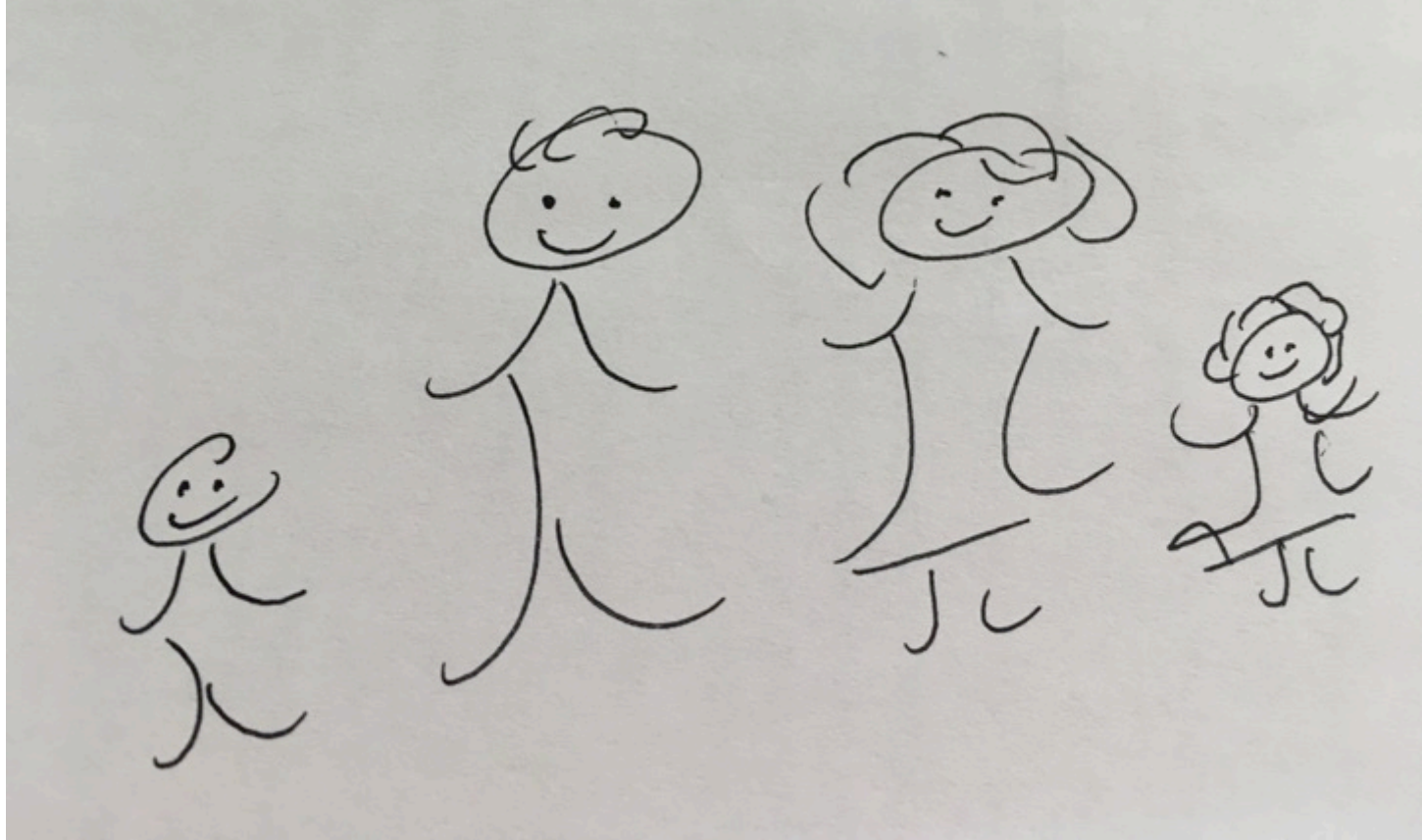


Moving to the Big City

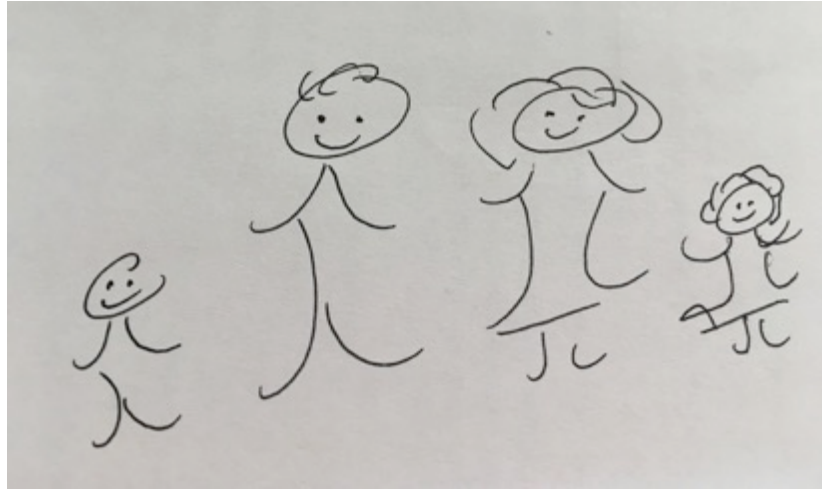
1. Divide your class into small groups.
2. Tell each group that they need:
 - one piece of paper and
 - one pencil for the whole group to use.
3. Draw a simple sketch of a happy family.



Moving to the Big City



Moving to the Big City



4. Explain that this family is moving to the Big City, and they are very happy.
5. Explain that each group must create a list of reasons the family members are happy. There will be one list per group.
6. Give the groups time to make their lists.

Let's try this ourselves.

What are some reasons why this happy family wants to move to the big city?



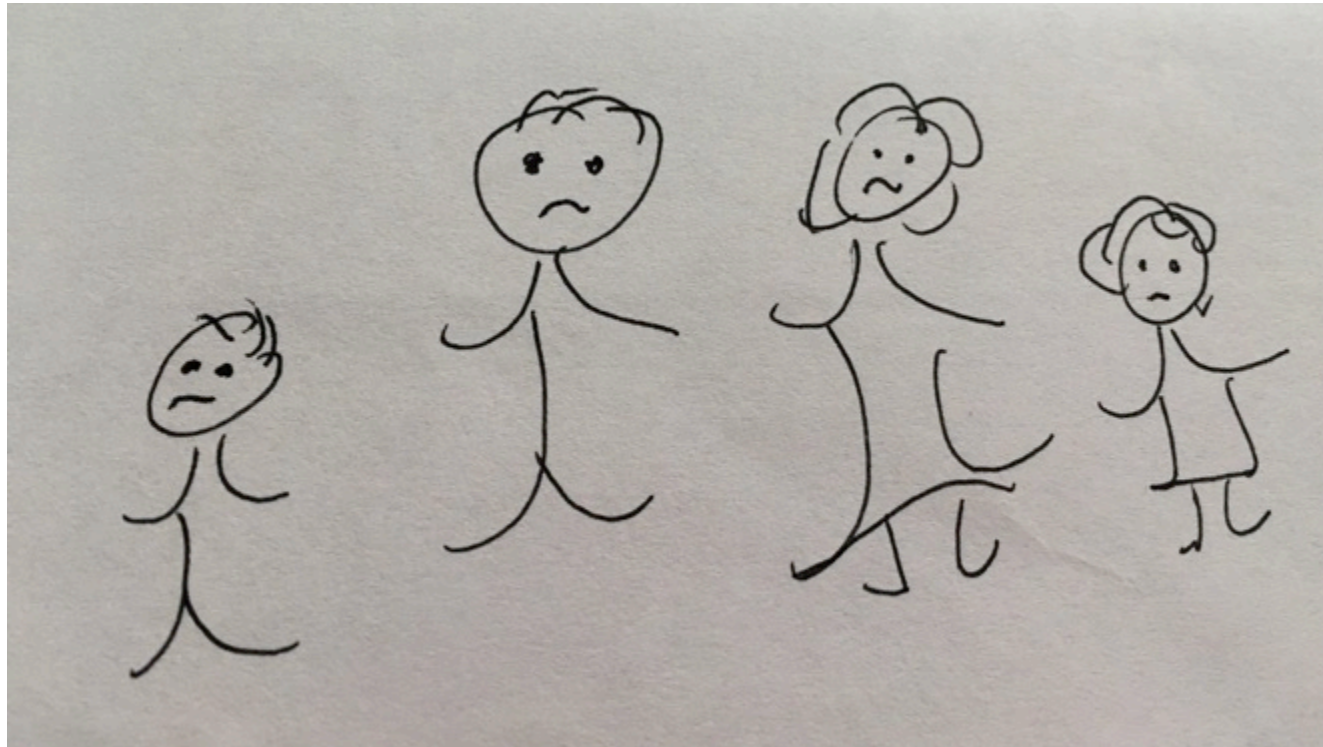
Moving to the Big City

7. Have each group read one of their reasons aloud to the class.
Continue until all reasons have been read.



Moving to the Big City

Well, five years have passed, and our family is not quite so happy. They wonder if moving to the Big City was a good idea.

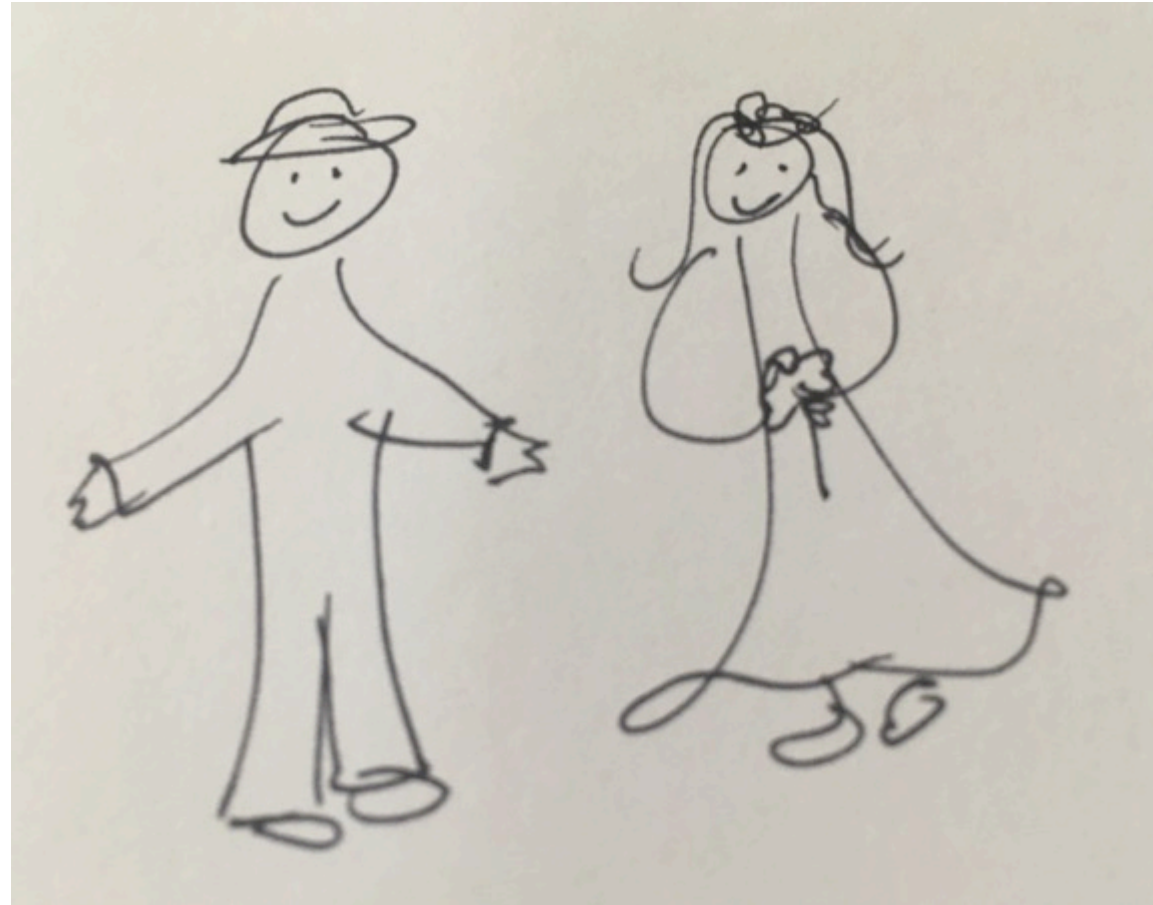


Please share your ideas about
why they are unhappy.



How can we adapt this activity format and use it again?

Wedding Bells



Now a few years have gone by, and our couple are not so happy.

Wedding Bells

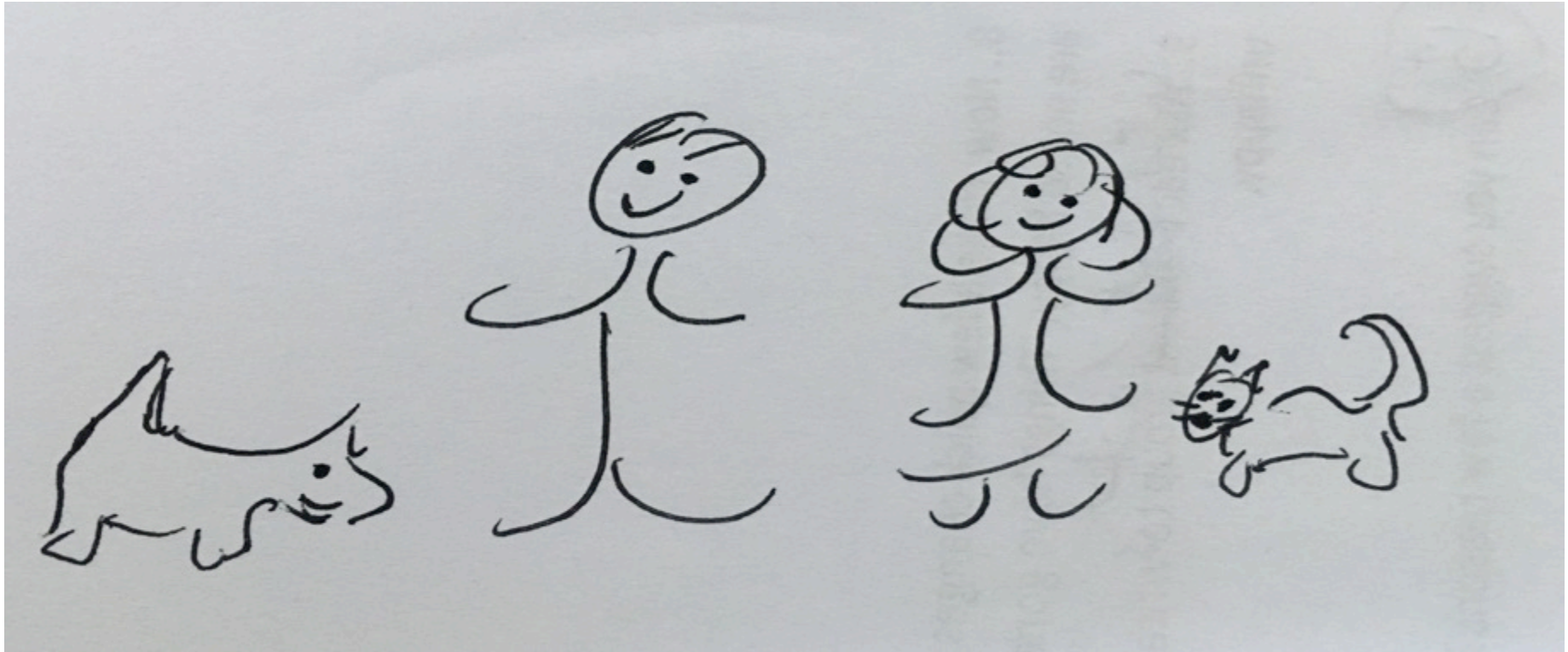


Do you have suggestions for
another way to use this format?



Getting a New Pet

For younger learners, you could present this situation:

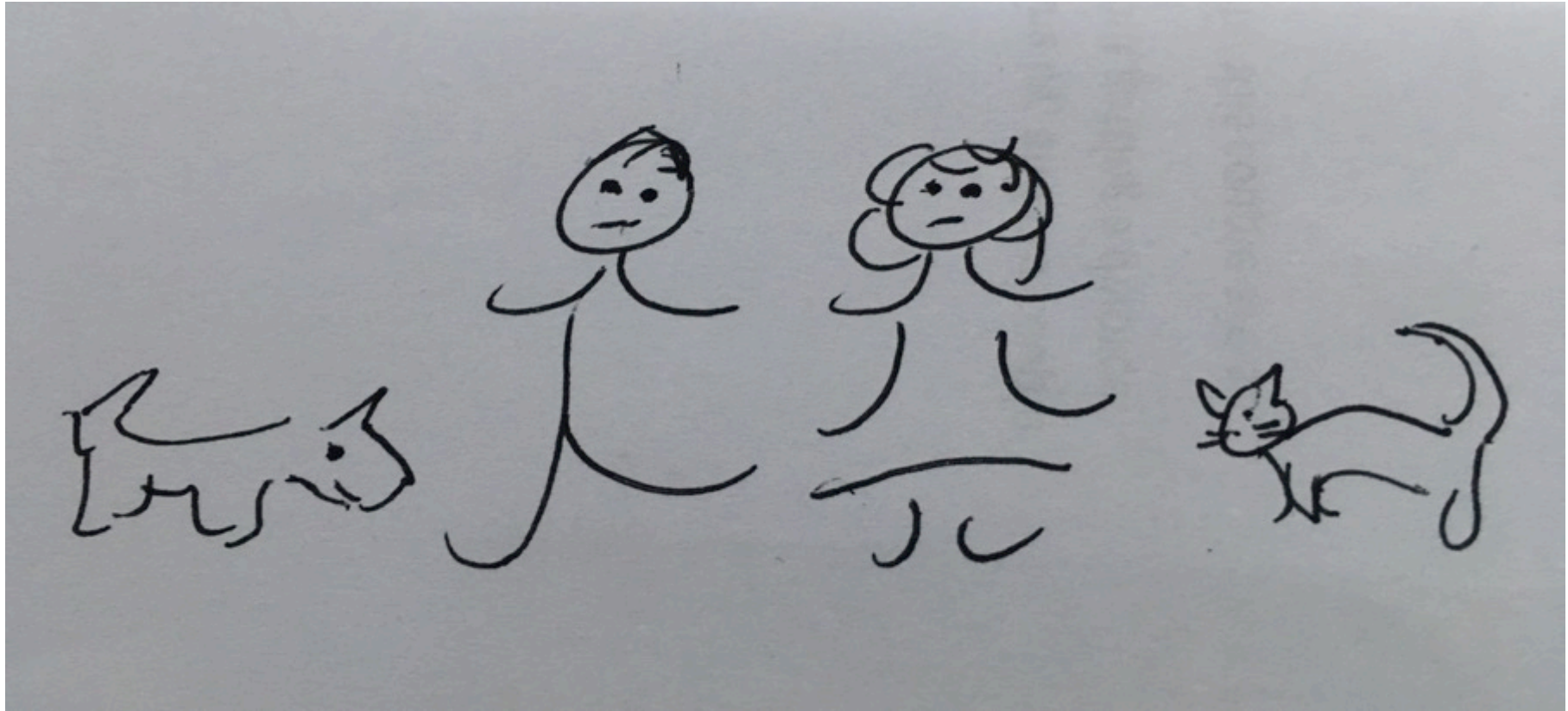


Please give us a few ideas
about why the children are
happy.



Getting a New Pet

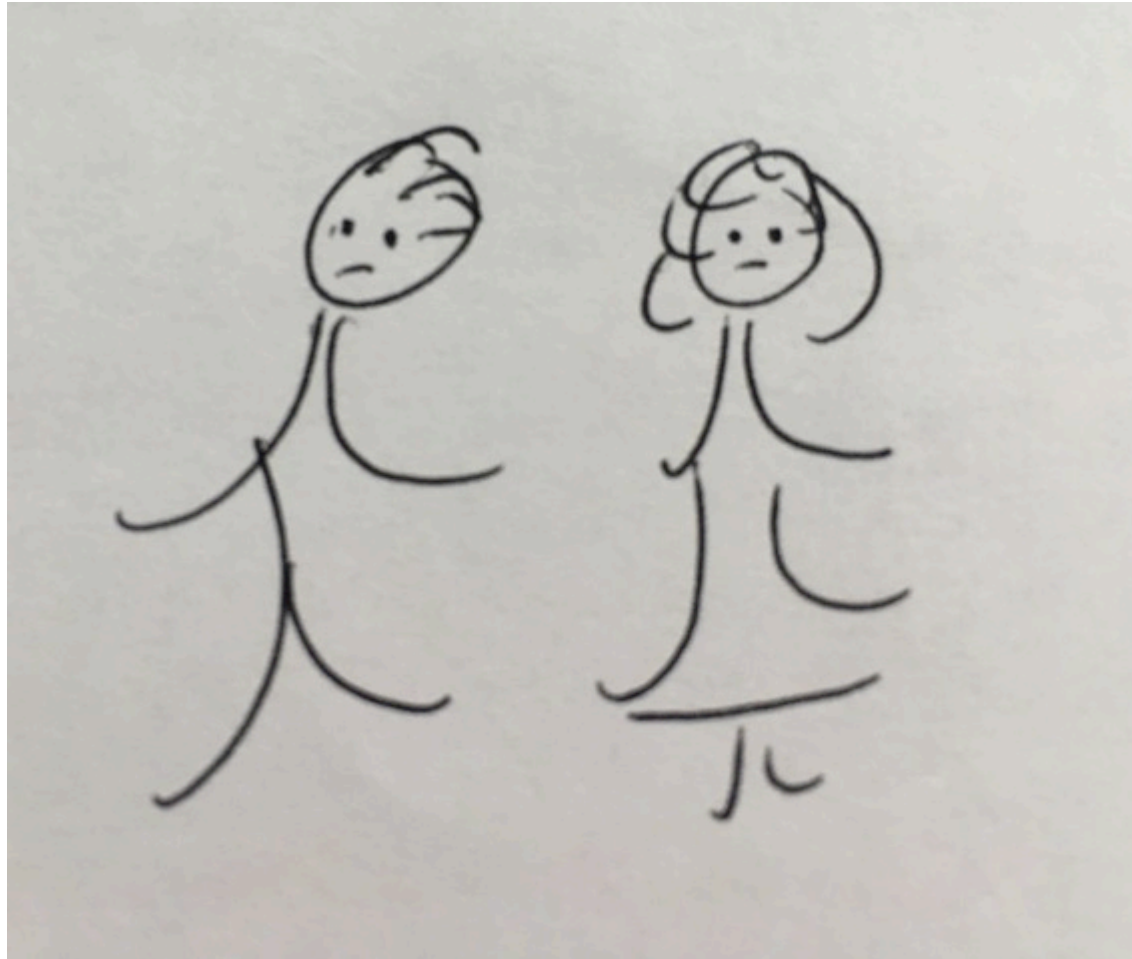
But of course, after a few weeks, the children have discovered some problems, too.



Let's think of a couple of ideas
about why the children are
less happy.



Children Moving to a New School

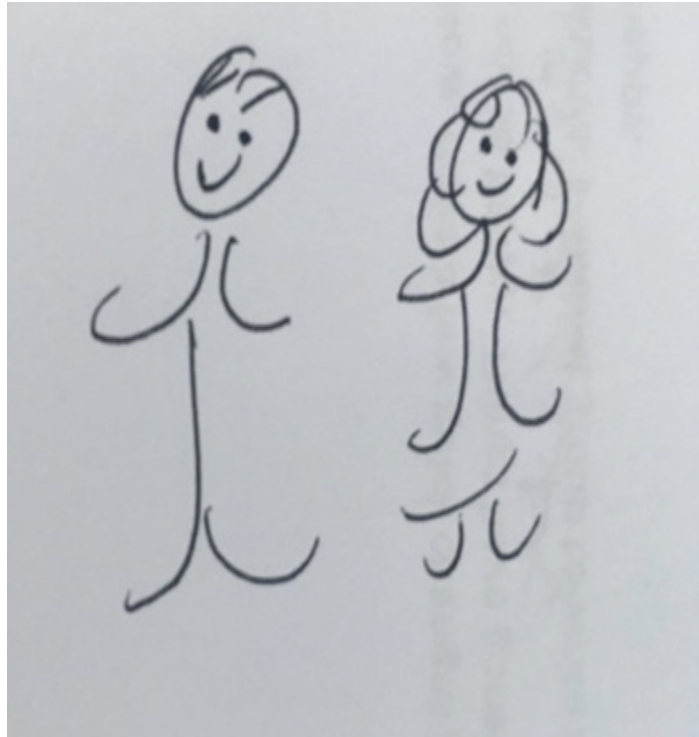


Please give us a couple of ideas about why the children are a little worried.



Children Moving to a New School

After a few months at the new school, things don't seem so bad.



Please give us a couple of ideas about why the children are happier.



Let's Evaluate!

- Does this activity give students practice using a structure?
- Do students express their own ideas on a topic that is meaningful to them?
- Does this activity provide scaffolding?



My Shield

Before class:

- choose a grammar structure.
- prepare a model of the target structure.
- prepare four questions that can be answered using that structure.



My Shield

For a lower level:

My favorite _____ is/are _____.

My favorite day is Sunday.

My favorite shoes are tennis shoes.

What is your favorite color?

What are your favorite desserts?

What is your favorite television show?

Who are your favorite singers?



My Shield

For a higher level:

Someone did something by _____.
I locked the door by using this key.

How did you help a friend this week?

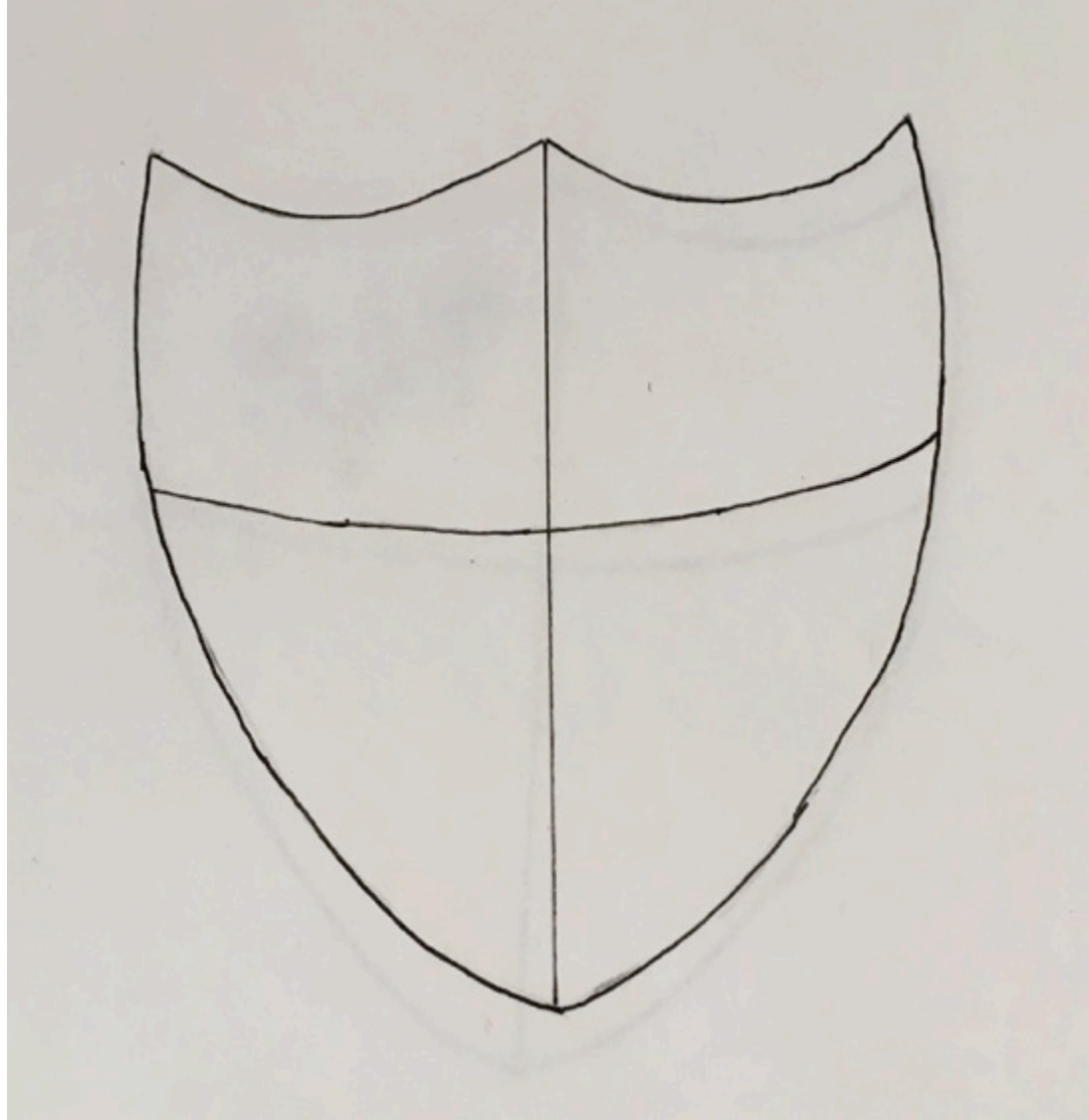
How did someone help you this week?

How did you relax last weekend?

How did you begin your day today?

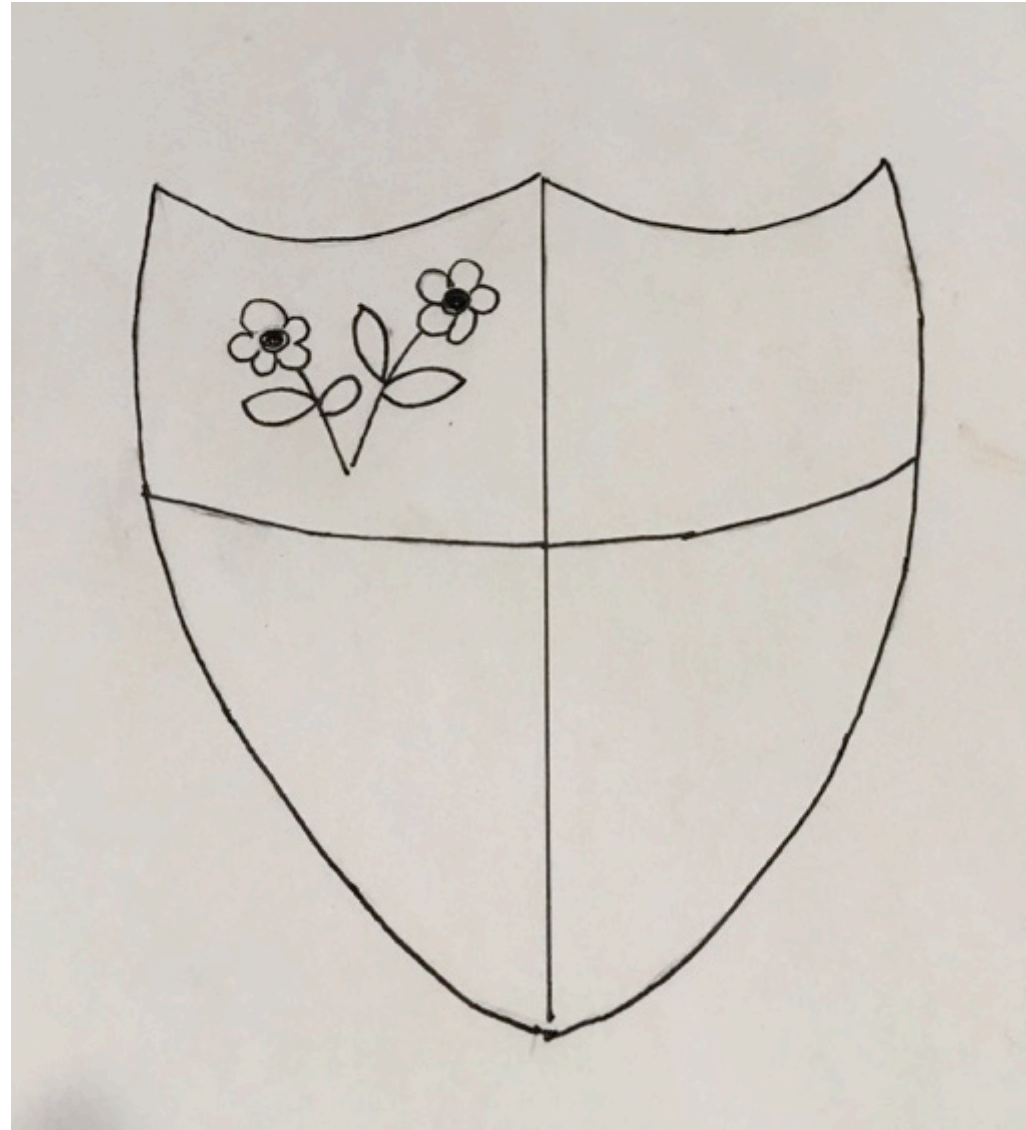


My Shield



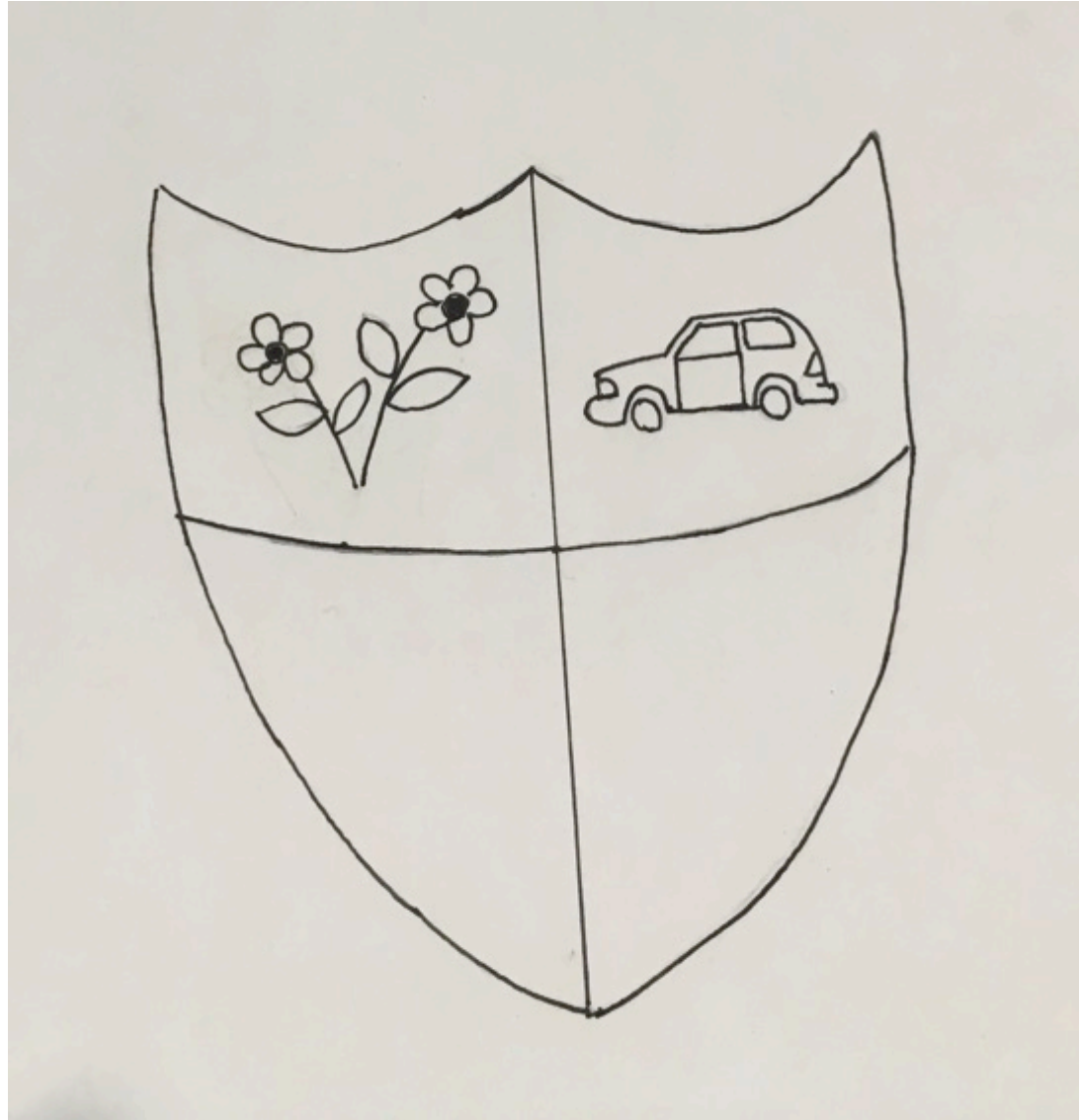
My Shield

How did you help a friend this week?



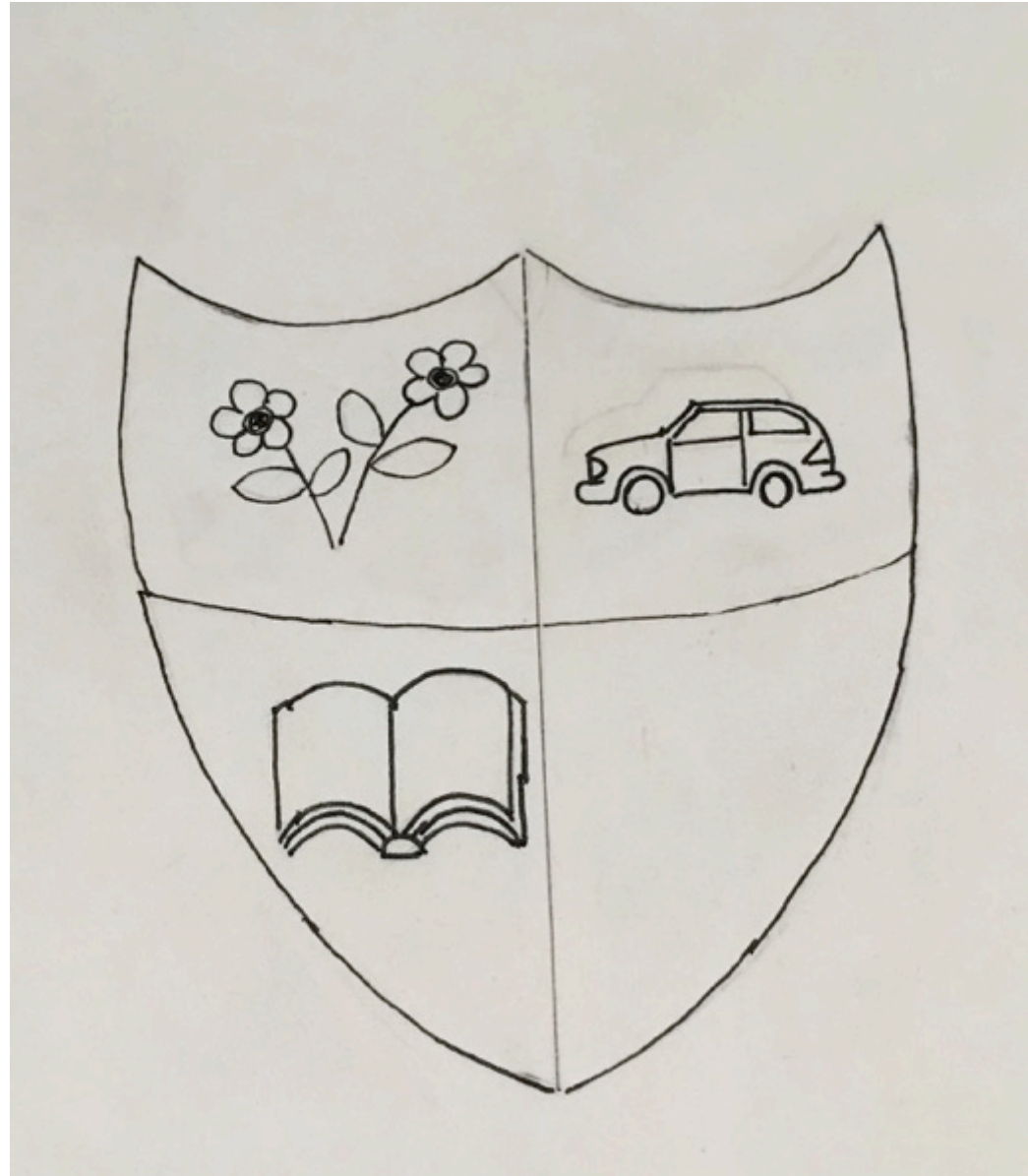
My Shield

How did someone
help you this week?



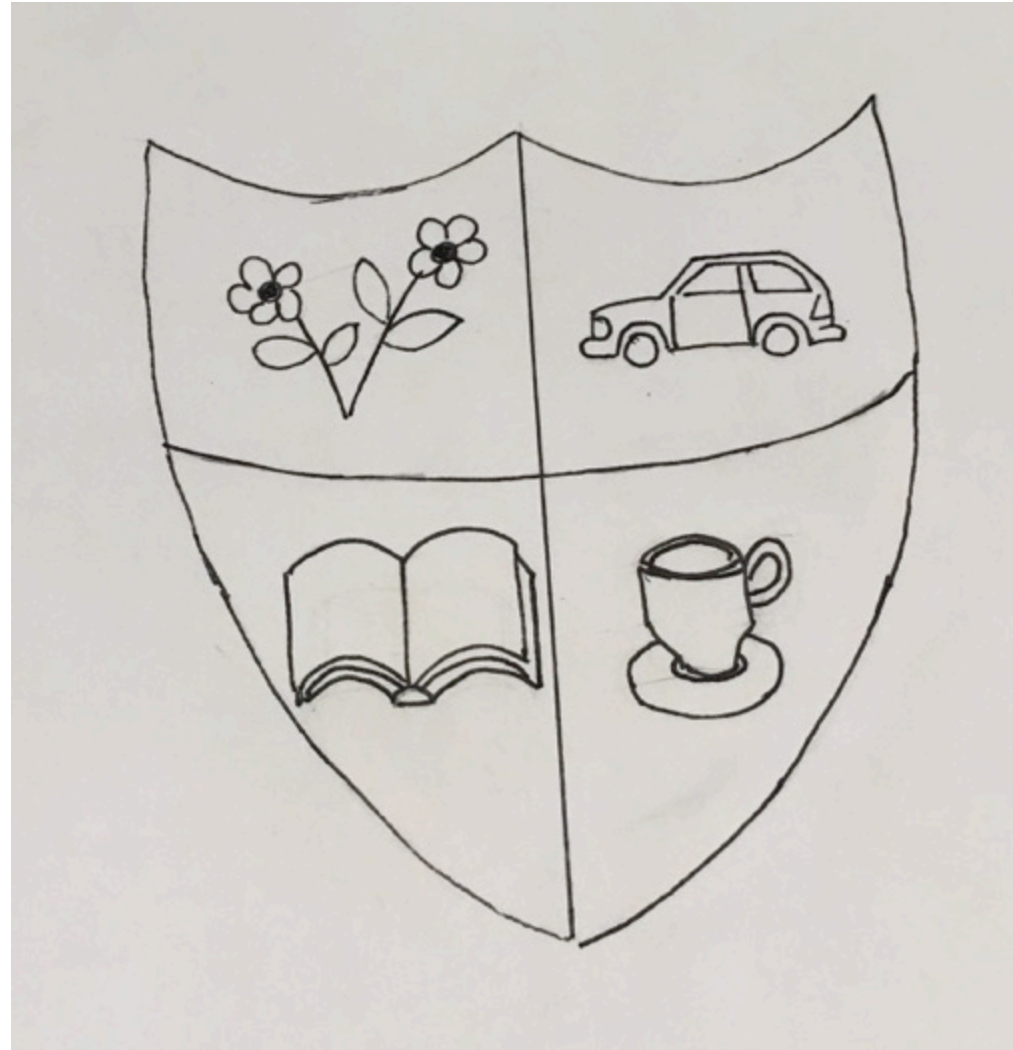
My Shield

How did you relax last weekend?



My Shield

How did you start
your day today?



My Shield

1. Have the students work in pairs. Each student explains why they chose the symbols that they drew, using the target structure.
2. When students have finished, have them work with a new partner and explain their shields again.



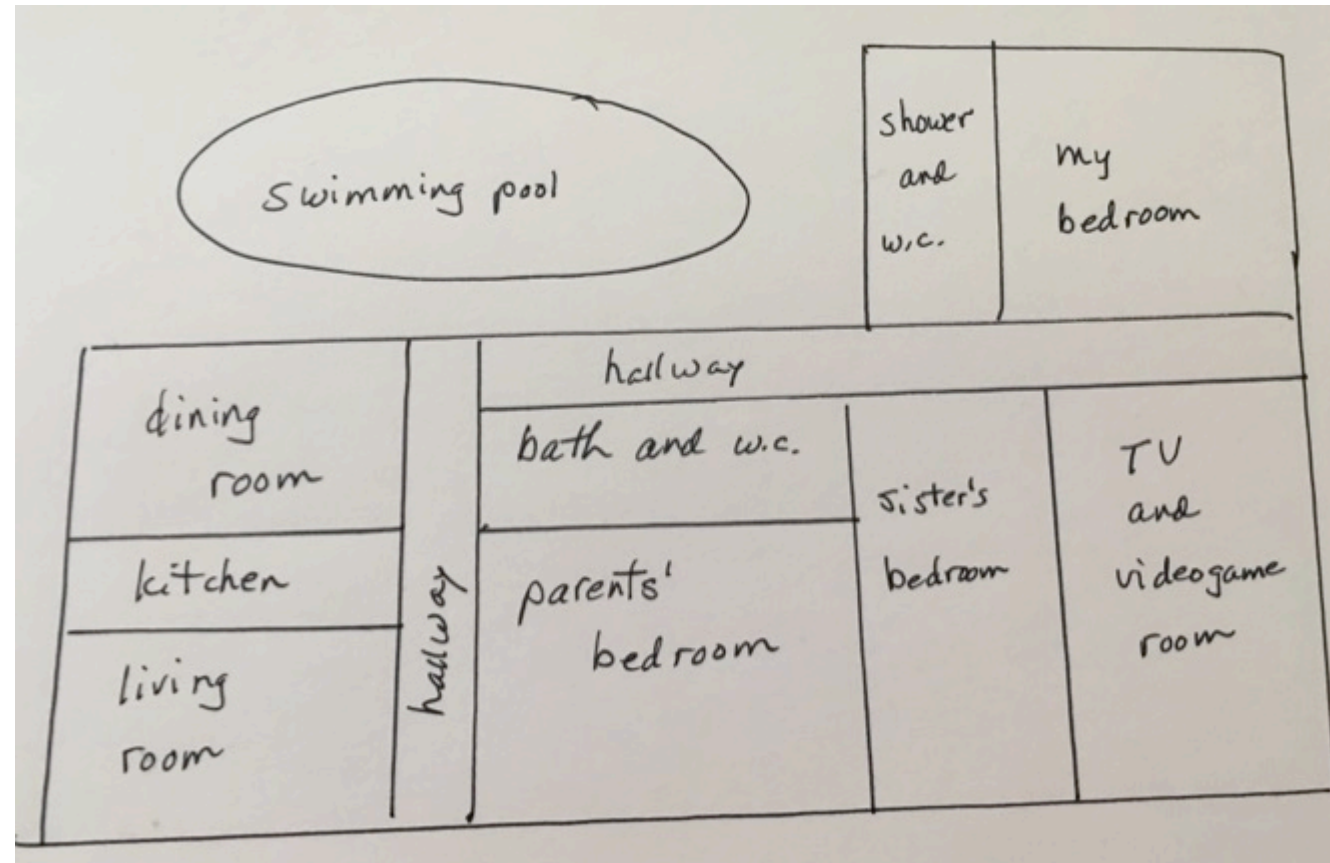
Let's Evaluate!

- Does this activity give students practice using a structure?
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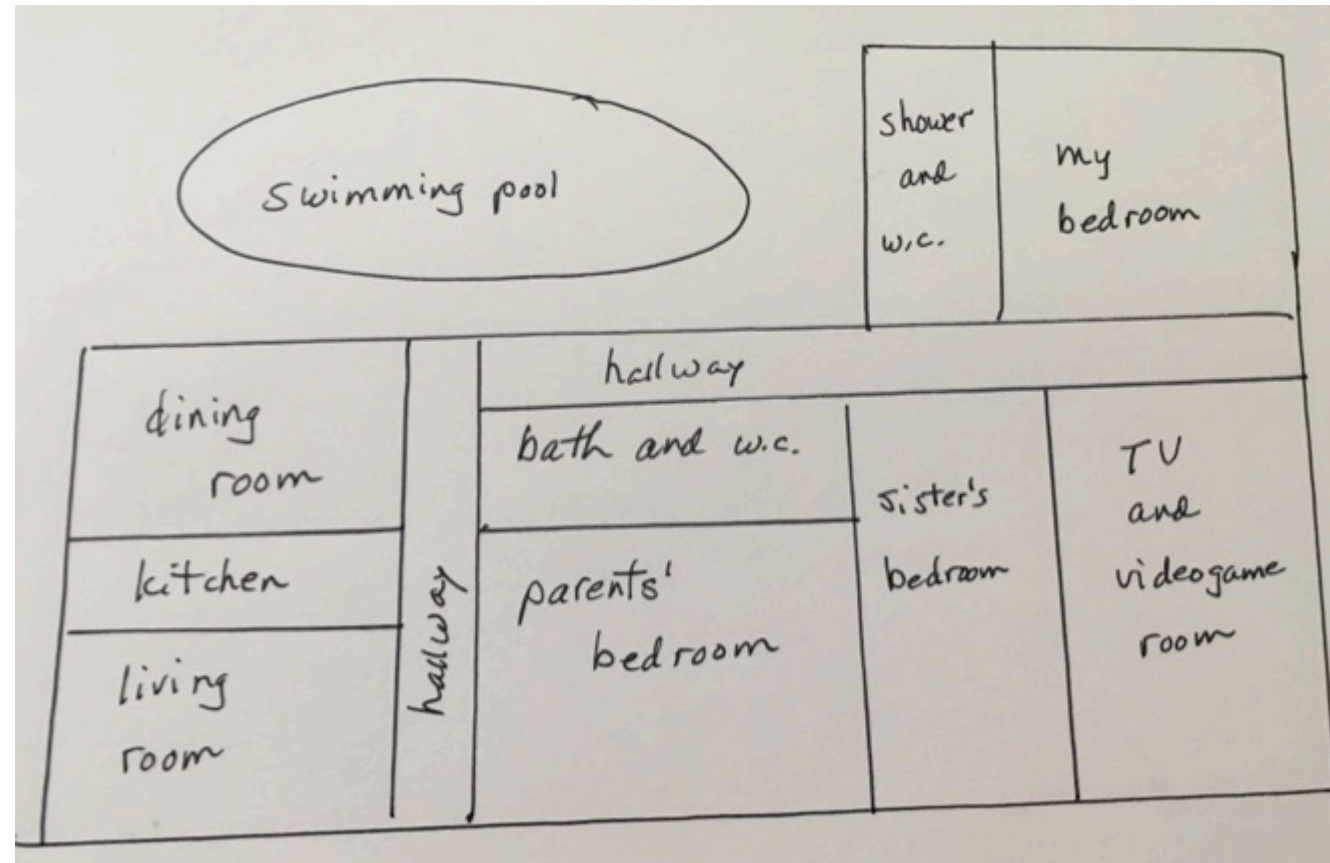
My Dream House

1. In class, show students an example floor plan and generate a list of useful vocabulary for describing one.



My Dream House

2. As homework, have students draw a floor plan for their dream house.



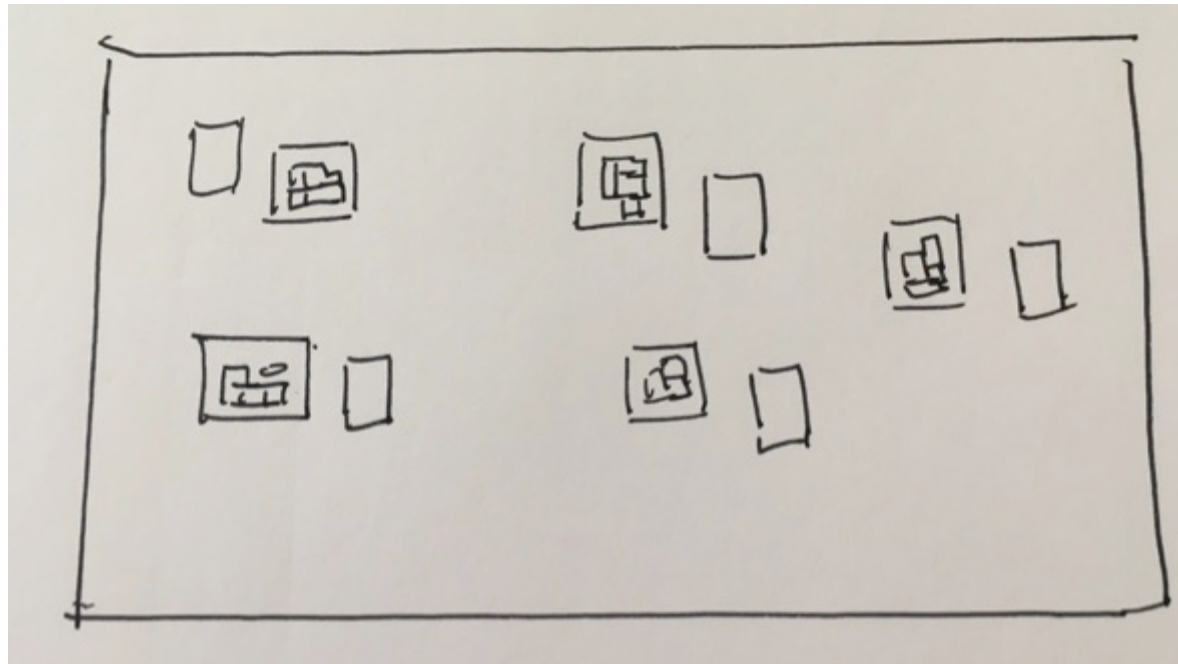
My Dream House

3. In class, have students, in pairs, describe to their partner the floor plan.
 - How many rooms are there?
 - What are the rooms?
 - What are the main furnishings in each room?
4. Change partners. Describe the plan again to the new partner.

My Dream House

Possible Additional Activities

- Have students write a description of their dream house.
- Post the floor plans and the written descriptions on classroom walls.



Let's Evaluate!

- Does this activity give students practice using a structure?
- Do students express their own ideas on a topic that is meaningful to them?
- Does this activity provide scaffolding?



Who are the true experts on teaching in your context?

YOU are!



References

- Wedding Bells activity, by MaryAnn Christison and Sharron Bassano, used by permission of the authors

Thank you!

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AMERICAN ENGLISH

Reflection and Discussion Questions

1. Which of these activities—What Are They Doing Today?, Moving to the Big City, My Shield, or My Dream House—could you use or adapt in your classes?
2. How do you try to adapt grammar instruction or practice activities in your curriculum to include locally or personally relevant content for your students?
3. Do you create an environment in your classes where language mistakes are seen as opportunities to learn and improve? How?



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